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FOOD FOR DEFENSE

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From the very beginning of our defense program, about a year ago, nearly everybody has assumed that "defense" means something more than increased production of guns and tanks and airplanes and the other machines of war. Under the Lend-Lease Act, food has been recognized as being part of that "something more."

It has become clear, suddenly and dreadfully clear, that the British are facing a possible food shortage. England normally imports about 65 percent of its food, so that the destruction of ports, the bombing of loading docks, and the sinking of merchant ships forced them to think about building up reserves of food—nonperishable foods, foods that could be stored indefinitely.

When the Congress and the people of this country started to talk about the lend-lease idea, food was one of the things that was always mentioned. The Department of Agriculture began to figure out just what America could supply to the British and the other nations resisting aggression, and what those nations needed most.

Some people thought the answer would be simple, since we had large surpluses of some farm products. We could just ship these surpluses to England and China, and the problem would be solved. But as the Department studied the food needs of the nations we wanted to help, it found that they needed products that are not on our surplus lists. We have lots of corn, wheat, tobacco, and cotton. But the British needs are for dairy products, meat, eggs, and poultry—things we had never produced too abundantly in America.

We don't have the necessary foods stored up, but we do have a national farm program through which American farmers can adapt themselves rapidly and effectively to the new situation--the urgent necessity of producing food for Britain and for our own defense. During the last eight years we have been building a machine to adjust production. It is a two-way machine, which can deal with the problem of surpluses by contracting production of some commodities and make sure of sufficient supplies by expanding production of others. It is a machine to produce abundance without waste. We have also been building an effective educational system which has made our farmers the most skillful farmers in the world, and we have expanded to the most disadvantaged groups in agriculture the opportunity to become skillful producers of food and fiber.

As the Department of Agriculture prepared to produce food for defense, it became clear that our problem was largely one of conversion. For we already had plenty of feed--700,000,000 bushels of corn stored up in our Ever-Normal Granary, and large supplies of oats, barley, and hay besides. Surplus corn was stored to bolster prices and keep corn producers from going bankrupt. That corn is now proving a boon to the cause of democracy. For this feed can now be converted into food that people can use. We can feed the corn and oats and barley and hay to cows and hogs and chickens, and get milk and pork and eggs to send to

Britain and to store for our own use.

Converting feed into food is more difficult than converting, say, steel or aluminum into airplanes. For one thing, it can't be rushed. You can build a new plane factory in a very few weeks, and you can work three shifts once you start production. But even in the midst of a defense program you can't make a little pig grow any faster than little pigs have always grown.

Again, you can't go out and make a contract with one farmer or a group of farmers to produce all the milk and pork and eggs that are needed. There is no one farmer big enough to do the job. So a way had to be devised to give every farmer the opportunity to produce more food for defense. Farmers are patriotic, but they have to make both ends meet just like anybody else in business. And before farmers could be expected to increase their production of dairy products, poultry products, and hogs, they had to know two things: What they would have to pay for feed and what they would get for their final products.

Through the stores of Government-owned corn in the Ever-Normal Granary, the prices of feed can be stabilized, and the Department of Agriculture has decided to sell this corn at about its present level for the next couple of years. The Department has also promised farmers that the Government will support prices of the foods that must be produced at levels which will insure a fair return to the individual farmer.

"Food for Defense" is an extension of the national farm program that has been developing since 1933. Because of that farm program, we are able to step up production of needed foods without plowing up poor soil, without ruining millions of acres of good American land as we did in the last war.

We can also provide an increased amount of food without taking food away from ordinary consumers. To Americans, accustomed to the idea of plenty, this may not seem as remarkable as it really is. Considering the fact that food is rationed somehow in every important European nation, American consumers are fortunate. If we had not gone into this emergency period with a stable farm program, increased production of food might have boosted food costs for every item on a housewife's grocery list. As it is, we can produce for England, produce for our own future, and still have as much for present needs as we had before.

Some people have been afraid that we might perhaps produce too much food for defense. That would probably be impossible. In our own city slums and in poor farms in every State, literally millions of American families are not getting enough food, and millions more are not getting enough variety in their present diets. Indeed, the present drive for increased food production is only partly a measure of aid for other countries. A part of it is for our own defense—against starvation

and against the inefficiency that comes from unhealthy workers.

And here is one final thought. We in America have stepped into the world arena. We have realized that we have a stake in this war, and that we have an even greater stake in the peace which is made afterwards. After the war, hungry people will come together at the conference table, their stocks and their soils depleted by war. The nation with the supplies of food, the nation that can offer to the world the abundance produced by democracy, will have a voice that speaks louder than shells and bombs. In producing food for defense we are also storing up food for peace and a democratic world.

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